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SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE LAW ENFORCEMENT AND JUDICIAL TRAINING
ASSESSMENT

REF: STATE 5448

¶1. In response to reftel, Embassy Freetown's Law Enforcement Working Group was convened on January 23 to discuss law enforcement and judicial capacity. Responses to reftel questions are presented in the following paragraphs. Please note that judicial capacity, including the court system and Department of Public Prosecutions, is not discussed; though the judicial system is known for corruption and ineffectiveness, other donors are collaborating with the Government of Sierra Leone to address these endemic problems. Post believes the best use of USG resources is a specific focus on law enforcement.

CHALLENGES

¶2. Sierra Leone faces significant internal and regional security challenges that must be combated by the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and other, non-military security agencies. Still recovering from the decade-long civil war, the country has economic and social problems that create an environment conducive to criminal activity. Economic instability, endemic unemployment and underemployment, limited educational and skills-training opportunities, and rising commodities prices heighten desperation. The government, due to a general lack of resources and infrastructure, is unable to provide an adequate social safety net for its vulnerable population. Financial insecurity is an enabling factor for individuals, particularly men aged 18-35, to resort to crime for their livelihood.

¶3. Theft is common in Sierra Leone, particularly in urban areas where wealth is intermingled with abject poverty. Home invasions targeting individuals with known wealth has increased over the past six months, and petty theft, such as pick-pocketing, break-ins, muggings, and car theft is a regular occurrence. Trafficking in persons is thought to be prevalent, but research indicates that it is largely not associated with a crime syndicate. Instead, trafficking in Sierra Leone usually occurs within families, and transnational cases are rare. Smuggling of goods, contraband, and people across the porous borders is common, particularly between Sierra Leone and Guinea.

¶4. Arguably the biggest problems facing Sierra Leone and the SLP are narcotics, resource theft, and terrorism. West African countries are increasingly being used as transit locations for narcotics shipments from South America to Europe and the Middle East, and Sierra Leone is no exception to this trend. The July 2008 bust that netted more than 700kg of cocaine is thought to be just one of many examples of Sierra Leone serving as a transit country for hard drugs. Increased incidence of drug muling has also been discovered through enhanced screening at the country's one international

airport, but likely represents only a small portion of the drug flow in and out of Sierra Leone. Its proximity to such known potential "narcostates" as Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, plus notoriety for having an ineffective police and judicial system and a culture of corruption makes Sierra Leone highly attractive to criminal organizations seeking an additional West African safe haven. Though strong action following the July bust, including arrests and trials for 18 suspects and the passage of a new, more stringent national drug control act, could be deterrents to further activity, the underlying issues of weak general security, vulnerability to corruption, and a dysfunctional judiciary are still considerable problems.

15. Resource theft is a constant concern in Sierra Leone, particularly with regards to marine resources and timber. Though Sierra Leone is well-known for its minerals, fish and seafood in the country's coastal waters could net tens of millions of dollars per year if properly harnessed. Instead, the inability of the SLP to patrol its coastline means that foreign fishing fleets are poaching potential profits with tacit impunity. Besides the current economic loss this represents, overfishing results in chronic depletion of the existing bio-mass, which impacts appropriate resource management for economic and environmental benefit in the future. The hardwood forests, also a valuable economic and environmental resource, are being illegally culled on a regular basis. Timber is often smuggled over the border to Guinea and Liberia. Sierra Leone does not have an effective means to patrol its forests, national parks, or borders.

16. Though terrorist acts have not occurred in Sierra Leone, and the government does not support or encourage terrorist

activity, Hizbollah fundraising cells are believed by many to be active here. The capacity of the SLP and intelligence units to gather adequate information on their activities, let alone combat them, is highly limited. With the minimal resources to police such activities as well as the unchecked element of corruption known to exist, Sierra Leone is in an excellent position, both logistically and geographically, to cultivate and support terrorist recruiting and training.

CAPACITY ISSUES

17. The SLP and related non-military security agencies have limited capacity to effectively handle the challenges facing them. Lack of resources - financial, physical, and human - is the biggest hurdle. Sierra Leone has severe budgetary problems that impact every facet of governance, including the security sector. Funding for even the most basic equipment or operational expenses, such as petrol for patrol vehicles, is often too expensive for the SLP's budget. The low salaries (approximately \$50/month for an officer) contribute to the difficulty in recruiting and retaining an effective force with the integrity to withstand bribery. While training is an SLP priority, it is generally not affordable.

18. Physical capital needs include such basic necessities as police stations with regular electricity and running water. The SLP also have a limited number of vehicles available, including trucks and motorbikes. The country has only a few vessels for conducting marine patrols. Evidence storage facilities and forensics labs are needed, but nonexistent. Besides these large-scale needs, the majority of police officers are themselves not properly equipped. Officers are not issued such requisite items as restraints, evidence-recovery kits, fingerprinting kits, or even notepads and pens.

19. Human capital is a noted problem. Though hiring new officers with potential is relatively easy in a country with few employment prospects, giving them the training they need to work effectively is costly. All officers receive rudimentary training, but this is inadequate. Corruption, as identified in para. 7, is an endemic problem within the

security services. The most competent officers, often the beneficiaries of international training investment by the U.S. or other Western countries, frequently seek higher-paying and prestigious postings with the AU, ECOWAS, and UN systems.

TRAINING

¶10. Training needs are far-reaching in Sierra Leone, and required for every rank, ranging from basic policing to specialized investigative techniques. Though the Justice Sector Development Program (JSDP), a UK-funded initiative, is attempting to meet some of these needs (para. 13), complementing and augmenting their efforts will help to fill significant gaps. Community-oriented policing, law enforcement techniques, evidence collection, crime scene preservation, and record-keeping and case management are just a small sample of the type of basic training the SLP could benefit from. Advanced leadership courses for mid-level and senior officers would be useful, as would be specialized courses covering financial crimes, narcotics, organized crime investigations, and managing intelligence. The SLP would be the prime recipient of such training, but the Office of National Security, including the Central Intelligence Security Unit, would also benefit. Other agencies with investigative or operational functions, such as the Anti-Corruption Commission, Financial Intelligence Unit, Customs and Border Patrol, and the Joint Maritime Wing could be additional targets for training.

SIERRA LEONEAN WILLINGNESS

¶11. The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) is eager for all types of technical assistance and support, particularly in the realm of peace and security. USG-funded training efforts to date have been well-received, and all agencies are quick to identify appropriate officers for opportunities that we provide. Post receives requests for training and equipment from the SLP and others in the security sector on a near-daily basis, and ramping up our efforts in this area would not only transfer needed knowledge to Sierra Leone, but

also help strengthen our bilateral relationship and security interests in the country and region.

CURRENT TRAINING EFFORTS

¶12. The United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office for Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) has eight seconded police officers from various nations providing technical assistance and training to the SLP in Freetown and other major urban centers. Their three primary areas of engagement are counter-narcotics, intelligence gathering, and improving professional standards. Embedded officers will focus their training efforts on particular units within the SLP, such as the Complaints, Discipline, Internal Investigations Department. One seconded officer from the Spanish police and two UNODC officers will work exclusively on counter-narcotics, and will train and assist members of the Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force. These efforts will provide excellent hands-on guidance for the SLP, but will end when UNIPSIL's mandate expires on September 30, 2009.

¶13. The JSDP, funded by the UK government, is a comprehensive response to inadequacies in the judicial and security sectors. Though a significant portion of the JSDP funding supports capacity-building for the country's court systems, assisting the Ministry of Internal Affairs, SLP, and prison system is also considered a priority. From 2008 through the first quarter of 2010, the JSDP has committed 121,000 GBP for the Ministry, 668,000 GBP for the SLP, and 416,180 for corrections management. The Ministry of Internal Affairs

lacks capacity to conduct its oversight role of the police and prisons, and the JSDP project seeks to provide training, create strategic plans, establish standard operating procedures, and develop mechanisms to enhance coordination with other relevant agencies. The SLP program includes a one-month training course for senior managers and a three-week course for mid-level managers on leadership and management skills. It also includes a refresher training on conducting criminal investigations. Along with these efforts, the JSDP is helping to restructure criminal intelligence-gathering within the SLP, and encouraging the deployment of trained investigators to rural areas. In the area of corrections, the program is focused on improving the structure, systems, and processes for prison management, preventing human rights abuses, improving records management, and training staff. According to JSDP staff, the biggest gap in their programming is the lack of specialized training. Forensics, for example, are a field in which there is no capacity and where in-depth training is desperately needed.

¶14. There is no non-military regional training center operating in Sierra Leone.

POST POC

¶15. Embassy Freetown's point of contact on this issue is P/E Officer Amy LeMar: lemaran@state.gov; 232-76-616-609.
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